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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006688

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES TIP, OTHER WOMEN'S ISSUES
WITH MINISTER

1. (SBU) Summary: In an October 22 introductory meeting, the Ambassador told State Minister Guldal Aksit (responsible for women's affairs) that Turkey could serve as a model on women's rights for the Middle East. He urged Turkey to implement recent initiatives to combat trafficking in persons (TIP), and to compile and release TIP-related data. Aksit said the GOT is committed to combating TIP. She said she is closely involved in discussions on amending elements of the Penal Code that discriminate against women. Unfortunately, the GOT office in charge of women's issues is understaffed. End Summary.

Turkey a Model for Middle East

2. (U) The Ambassador told Aksit Turkey could serve as an example for the Middle East in the area of women's rights. The latest Human Development Report on the Arab states cites the lack of female empowerment as a major factor in the continued underdevelopment of the region. The economic, political, artistic, and literary creativity of the Arab states are being stifled by the exclusion of women, among other factors. As an example, the report notes that Turkey alone published more works of creative literature over the past year than the entire Arab world combined. Aksit agreed Turkey has made good progress on women's issues. While women in Turkey continue to be underrepresented in government, they comprise 25-30 percent of the workforce in areas such as law, architecture, and medicine. Unlike some European governments, the GOT does not support the use of quotas to promote equality. The goal is to provide equal opportunity for women. Unfortunately, Turkey faces problems, particularly in the southeast, where a traditional culture that discriminates against women and the lingering effects of the PKK conflict have created a situation in which many girls are poorly educated.

Ambassador: Continue Fight Against TIP

3. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the GOT launched a number of initiatives that elevated Turkey from Tier III to Tier II in the State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. He said he would like to encourage continued progress against TIP. Legislation alone is not enough -- the GOT will have to follow through on implementation in order to reach its broader goals. Two specific actions could prove valuable: establishing shelters for trafficking victims, and conducting an information campaign to inform the public about TIP-related laws and the rights of TIP victims. In addition, the GOT could help keep track of its progress by collecting, and releasing, regular TIP-related data in areas such as arrests, prosecutions, utilization of services, etc. Aksit said the GOT is committed to combating trafficking. The GOT's Directorate General on the Status and Problems of Women has created a new committee on TIP. Civil society in Turkey is now fully engaged on the issue. Unfortunately, the GOT has yet to adopt organizing legislation for the Directorate General, leaving the office understaffed. Once this problem is resolved, the GOT should be able to make more rapid progress on TIP and other areas affecting women.

Penal Code to be Amended

4. (U) The Ambassador said some women's groups argue that elements of the Turkish Penal Code discriminate against women (Note: Controversial articles include: rape between spouses is not a crime; rapists and kidnappers can avoid punishment if they marry their victims; and punishments for rape are

greater if the victim is married, lesser if the victim is single, and even lesser if the victim is single and not a virgin. End Note). Aksit said she met October 21 with female parliamentarians and members of the parliamentary Justice Committee to discuss proposed amendments to Penal Code articles relating to crimes against women. She said she will follow the amendments closely, and periodically brief female MPs, to ensure that the law, once amended, no longer discriminates against women.

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